

VZCZCXRO7519
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHBJ #4030/01 3280726
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 240726Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2412
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 024030

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/24/2031
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: STATIC ON THE STREETS OF BEIJING: NEW CCTV TOWER
IRKS ARCHITECTS, STAFF AND NEIGHBORS

Classified By: Classified by Political Section Internal Unit Chief
Susan A. Thornton. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Construction of China Central Television's soaring new headquarters tower is in full swing in central Beijing. But even as the ambitious project generates a buzz at New York's Museum of Modern Art, criticism and controversy simmer at home. Contacts grouched that the cost of the building is too high and that the selection process for the design was non-transparent. Local residents, fed up with round-the-clock construction noise, painted anti-Communist Party and anti-CCTV slogans on a nearby building. Such sentiments reflect frustration among regular citizens who feel they have little say in the urban planning decisions that affect their lives, contacts said. Despite the complaints, with strong official backing and with the structure itself starting to take shape, there is little chance work will halt. End Summary.

Crooked Doors, Bird's Nests, Alien Eggs

¶2. (C) The USD 750 million budget for the CCTV headquarters complex comes from the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), Chinese media has reported. A Central Government panel selected Dutch celebrity architect Rem Koolhaas' blueprint in 2002 in a closed process, contacts told us. The key feature of the project will be a 54-story office building in the shape of a cantilevered arch. In photos of the prototype, the bridge of the arch juts out, appearing to defy gravity. With the mockup pictures widely available on the Internet, Beijing residents have already dubbed it "The Crooked Door." (Note: This is in keeping with local tradition. The Olympic Stadium in northern Beijing is nicknamed "The Bird's Nest," while citizens of the capital call the nearly completed opera house behind the Great Hall of the People "The Alien Egg." End Note.)

¶3. (C) Li Xiaoping (protect), a longtime producer at CCTV, said a special committee with representatives from SARFT, the State Council Information Office, CCTV and other Government organs voted on and approved the design and location for the new headquarters. The final tally was not unanimous, Li related, adding that CCTV brass voted "no" on the project. CCTV staff are annoyed about the move, Li said. The new location is across town from the current headquarters in western Beijing. Many of Li's colleagues own apartments on that side of town and are miffed at the prospect of having to commute. The traffic around the new location, already bad, will be nightmarish, she predicted. Exacerbating the congestion will be

hundreds of visitors who go to CCTV every day on routine business. In addition, regular citizens currently flock to the network to air grievances in the hopes that one of the network's investigative news magazine programs will publicize their plight. These callers will not likely shy away just because CCTV has a new address, Li said.

The Price of Progress?

14. (C) The price tag of the building dismays many on CCTV's staff, including Rui Chenggang (protect), a popular anchor and talk show host. "Spending three quarters of a billion dollars on a headquarters building is wasteful," Rui complained to poloff, charging that the funds should be spent on production development and new technology. "There is no reason for the expense," he added. Instead, Rui argued that CCTV's identity should be defined by the shows it produces, not the building it inhabits. Ma Guoxin, Director of the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design (BIAD), separately agreed. The CNN and BBC television headquarters, for example, are located in nondescript "glass box" buildings, he observed.

15. (C) Ma, whose firm failed in its 2002 bid to build the CCTV complex, is a vocal critic of the project. He decried the lack of transparency in the selection process and said he has written a letter of complaint about the tower's plans. He has opted not to send the missive, he said, because he does not want officials to retaliate by rejecting BIAD's bids on Olympic projects. Spending a lot of money on a headquarters

BEIJING 00024030 002 OF 002

building is one thing for a rich private company or foundation, Ma argued. But CCTV is a Central Government entity and is using public funds. As such, he said, the Government should have exercised more prudence with its purse strings. Lu Zhou, Vice Dean of Tsinghua University's School of Architecture, separately made a similar point. Given the transport, environment and health care challenges the capital is facing, why spend so much on a blockbuster project like this, he wondered, adding that he has opposed the project from its inception.

16. (C) Ma of BIAD lamented to poloff that high-level officials award big-ticket works like the CCTV tower without considering the practical effect on the citizens of the city. Beijing residents should have more of a say in how their city is being transformed, he commented. In particular, Ma criticized the Government for awarding the contract to build the Bird's Nest, Beijing's 80,000-seat Olympic Stadium, to a foreign firm, Herzog and de Meuron of Switzerland. Ma claimed this is the first time a host country has farmed out construction of its showcase Olympic stadium to non-native architects. "This should be a chance for local Chinese architects to show their ability," Ma fumed.

"Oppose CCTV!"

17. (C) Nearby residents and shopkeepers are mixed in their views about the construction project. Last summer, inhabitants of a nearby apartment building spray-painted protests on the walls outside the upper floors of their building: "Oppose the Communist Party!" and "Oppose CCTV!" The graffiti, clearly visible from the busy Third Ring Road, was painted over in less than a day. Staff at a row of sundries stores and restaurants across from the site, however, were content to let fate dictate their fortunes. For

the time being, their businesses are booming as construction workers stream into their establishments for drinks and food throughout the day and night. But the bounty will not last forever, acknowledged one clerk in a convenience store, who said he expects his building, an unsightly one-story concrete box, to be demolished when the new complex opens. "There is no room for buildings like this one here," he said. The prospect does not make him nervous. Without even an electronic cash register, his operation has little overhead. When the wrecking ball swings, he will simply move his store to a new busy location, he said.

Randt